



Guidelines

Ravalli County Open Lands Bond Program

Introduction

Recognizing the pressures imposed upon the open lands of Ravalli County by rapid growth, the Board of County Commissioners, following a unanimous request by the Right to Farm and Ranch Board, placed before the voters of the County an initiative to create a \$10,000,000 bond program to preserve the open lands of the county. The general purpose of the bond program is to identify and provide funds for conservation easements on open private lands in order to: "...manage growth, preserve open lands, protect water quality of streams and the Bitterroot River, maintain wildlife habitat, protect drinking water sources, pay landowner costs associated with the sale and issuance of the bonds...".(Resolution 1946, State of Montana Ravalli County) Voters approved this initiative on the November 7th general election.

Application procedure

Beginning in August, 2007, applications for funding will be accepted four times a year and must be submitted no later than 4:00 pm on the first day of the following months: February, May, August, and November. These dates are firm. Proposals should be submitted to the Ravalli County Planning Department in an envelope marked "Open Lands Application".

Ravalli County Planning Department
215 S. 4th Street, Suite F
Hamilton, MT 59840

Applicants are advised that all materials submitted in the application become part of the public record. The Open Lands Board will forward its recommendations to the Ravalli County Commissioners no later than sixty (60) days after the acceptance deadline.

Proposals for funding through the Ravalli County Open Space Bond Program will be considered by the Open Lands Board and the Ravalli Board of County Commissioners by the submission of materials in three phases: pre-application, full application, and final documentation. Incomplete applications will not be reviewed and will be returned. If your application is returned, you will be encouraged to apply for funding in the next cycle.

Pre-application materials Pre-application materials are intended to provide the Planning Department Staff with enough information so that they can make a preliminary evaluation of the property in consideration, identify any potential issues, and hold a constructive conversation the about the proposal. Materials for this section should include:

- A pre-application worksheet, including a one page narrative description of the property, interest of owner, and any exceptional attributes
- Legal description of the property
- Proof of current ownership
- General map of property and proposed conservation easement

Additionally, a meeting will be held with the Planning Department, a Supporting Land Trust, and the Applicant to discuss the proposal.

Full application materials Full application materials should cover substantive issues such as the agricultural, natural and community aspects of the property. These materials, provided by the Applicant and the Sponsoring Land Trust, will be utilized by the Planning Department, Open Lands Board, and BCC to fully evaluate the proposal. Materials in the full application should include:

- Completed Project Scoring Worksheet
- Project Scoring narrative/documentation
- Map of sufficient size to show the following items:
 - Property Boundary of property identified in legal description
 - All surrounding properties, as well as any other properties with significant farm/ranch or wildlife attributes within a one-mile radius of property boundary
 - Area of proposed conservation easement
 - Areas of deeded land, leased land, or permitted land (including identity of lessor or permitting party)
 - Other conservation easements on Applicant's land or on adjacent properties
 - Locations of improvements showing houses, barns, outbuildings, fences, irrigations ditches and any other substantial structures
 - Locations of proposed reserved home sites
 - Areas of irrigated land and areas of crop cultivation
 - Rivers, streams, creeks, wetlands, natural areas and wildlife habitat
 - Public trails, proposed trails and public access to public lands or rivers
 - Locations of historic features
 - Federal or state highways, major and minor county collector roads, and private roads
- Photos of property
- Any other supporting documentation

This phase of the application process will also include a site visit by a technical sub-committee of the Open Lands Board.

Final Documentation If the proposal is approved by the BCC the following documentation will be required before the sale of bonds and the release of monies can proceed.

- Conservation Easement Document and Baseline Documentation Report
- Title commitment for the subject property and resolution of and title issues
- Final appraisal
- Purchase agreement

- Environmental Hazard Survey concerning hazardous materials (as described by the federal government) that may or may not be located, used or disposed of on the property
- An agreement between the County and the Sponsoring Land Trust regarding joint responsibilities
- A Mineral Rights Statement
- A narrative describing the Closing Arrangement- where the closing is to occur, closing participants, settlement sheets, escrow arrangements if required, the cost of closing, etc.

Please see the Application Procedure Checklist for the complete application procedure.

Project Scoring Worksheet and Narrative

While all of the information submitted will be utilized to evaluate an application, one tool, which has been developed in order to help evaluate projects, is the Project Scoring Worksheet. This worksheet is intended to provide applicants and evaluators with a standard method of evaluating proposals within the determined criteria. Please be aware that although a numeric system is used to evaluate a project, there may be circumstances where this system does not truly reflect the value or uniqueness of a project. The Project Scoring Worksheet is only one tool available in the evaluation process and the entire application will be taken into consideration when determining funding. As part of the full application submittal, applicants, in cooperation with the Supporting Land Trust, should submit a completed Project Scoring Worksheet, as well documentation to prove, justify, or otherwise substantiate answers for all scoring criteria. Additionally, a technical sub-committee of the Open Lands Board will complete a Project Scoring Worksheet independent of the Applicant's worksheet as part of the evaluation process. Projects will be evaluated on their own merit and not against other projects in the funding period.

Scoring Worksheet There are five major categories reflecting the goals of the Ravalli Open Lands Program: General Attributes, Agriculture Resources, Natural Attributes, Additional Community Benefits, and Leverage. Within each category there are 2 to 8 questions to be evaluated with score between 0 and 4. When scoring a project, applicants should indicate the number of points for each question in the space provided on the worksheet.

A minimum total score of 60 will be needed for the project to be considered, as well as a minimum score of 8 on the Agriculture Resources section and a minimum score of 16 on the Natural Attributes section. (These sections have been weighted in order to best reflect the goals and priorities of the Open Land Bond as laid out in Resolution No. 1946)

The scoring breakdown for each category is as follows:

- | | |
|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| • General Attributes | 16 points possible |
| • Agriculture Resources | 32 points possible |
| • Natural Attributes | 32 points possible |
| • Additional Community Benefits | 8 points possible |
| • Leverage | 12 points possible |

- Special attributes

16 points possible

Total of 100 points possible / minimum of 50 needed

Special Attributes The Open Lands Board recognizes the need to consider certain projects as exceptional, or having special components, and needing another layer of evaluation to boost their point total in the overall criteria framework. The Board also recognizes that it will be difficult, if not impossible, to account for all potential special attributes. With that in mind, example special attributes have been provided, but other will also be considered. However, the Board will pay particular attention to special attributes and they should be fully and completely justified with supporting evidence.

Points for these special project attributes, when they exist, should be added to the score of the section in which they most appropriately apply to. *Points from special attributes will not detract from the total score, only add to it.* These questions can provide a total of upto 16 “bonus” points per project.

Narrative Please find below a detailed explanation for each criteria as well as examples of documentation which might be provided in order to support that criteria. For items in the Project Scoring Worksheet, number 1-29, please provide succinct narrative description or documentation of the information requested in order as listed.

General Attributes

Sizable properties with a larger proportion of the property placed under conservation easement, fewer retained home sites and water rights remaining with the land provide greater conservation benefit. The entire property in question should be considered when answering these questions.

1. Size of Property– what is the total acreage of the property or ranch, including deeded land, leased land, and/or permitted public land?
2. Area of Property to be restricted by easement - what is the total acreage of the deeded land to be restricted by the conservation easement?
3. Water Rights – What is the water availability appurtenant to the property that will remain with the property?
4. Percentage of Land Reserved For Future Home Sites – Excluding the existing home sites on the property, what percentage of the property is planed for future home sites? Please be aware that planning for a reserved home site does not guarantee the granting of that home site. Applicants wishing to add additional homes must comply with County Subdivision and Zoning Regulations, as applicable.

Agricultural Resource

The purpose of this category is to determine the quality of the land resource for agricultural production and its potential to stay in agriculture. Only the portion of the property under consideration for an easement should be considered when answering these questions.

5. Percentage of Soils Classified as Prime/Statewide Importance or Unique/Locally Significant by NRCS– what percentage of the soils in the deeded portion of the property are identified as having statewide importance and/or local significance according to NRCS criteria? Please see <http://soils.usda.gov/> for more information.
6. Amount of Irrigated or Potentially Irrigated Land – what percentage of the proposed conservation easement area is irrigate and/or sub-irrigated pasture?
7. AUM Potential for the Protected Property Under Best Management Practices– what is the number of average Animal Units Maintained (AUM) (including cattle, sheep, hogs and dairy cows) that could potentially be carried on the property under the use of Best Management Practices per NRCS Criteria?
8. Type of Irrigation- Is the property irrigated? Please provide information related to the type(s) of irrigation used on the subject property. If more then one type is used, please score based on the primary method used.
9. Crop/hay/ timber Production Potential Under Best Management Practices – e.g. what is the average annual production of hay and/or alfalfa (tons), wheat and/or barley (bushels), timber (board feet), or other crops produced on the property?
10. Integration of Best Management Practices (BMPs) into farm/ranch management- please provide documentation, if applicable, supporting the use of BMPs on the subject property.
11. Proximity to Other Operating Farm/Ranches- is the property close to other farm/ranches and if so, how close (in miles)?
12. Proximity to Other Farm/Ranches Protected by Conservation Easements– is the proposed conservation easement close to other farm/ranches that are protected by conservation easements?

Natural Attributes

The purpose of this category is to determine whether the property possesses important wildlife habitat and movement corridors, natural plant communities and/or water resources that help maintain the quality of surface water and underground aquifers. Only the portion of the property under consideration for an easement should be considered in these questions.

13. Percentage of Soils Classified as Hydric or Typically Associated with Wetland or Riparian areas- does the property have soils rated as 'severe' or being described as alluvium or colluvium? Often these soils associated with lands able to support wetland or riparian areas.
14. Significant Habitat Diversity – does the property contain significant habitat as defined and identified by Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks? For more information please see <http://fwp.mt.gov/default.html>
15. Significant Species Diversity- does the property contain significant wildlife and vegetation diversity as defined and identified by Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks? For more information please see <http://fwp.mt.gov/default.html>
16. Protection of Stream Quality – does the property contain a perennial river or stream that constitutes a significant water resource, fishery (according to Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks criteria) or aquifer recharge area? Water resources may include water from artificial distribution systems- i.e. irrigation ditches, if it has natural attributes- however no artificial water source may receive more than 2 points. For more information please see <http://fwp.mt.gov/default.html>
17. Protection of Wetland/Open Water Quality- does the property contain a water body or wetlands that constitutes a significant water resource, fishery (according to Montana Fish Wildlife and Parks criteria) or aquifer recharge area? Water resources may include water from artificial distribution systems- i.e. irrigation ditches, if it has natural attributes- however no artificial water source may receive more than 2 points. For more information please see <http://fwp.mt.gov/default.html>
18. Integration of Best Management Practices (BMPs) into Habitat/Wildlife/Water Management- are BMPs used on the property? Please provide documentation, if applicable, demonstrating the use of BMPs on the subject property.
19. Proximity to Significant Wildlife, Fisheries, Natural Areas, or Important Bird Areas – is the property close to other significant wildlife /natural areas and if so, how close (in miles)?
20. Proximity to Other Natural Area Properties Protected by Conservation Easements or to Public Lands– is the proposed conservation easement close to other significant natural or wildlife areas that are protected by conservation easements or to public lands?

Additional Community Benefits

The purpose of this category is to determine whether the property has significant recreational, scenic and public policy values important to the community. Only the portion of the property under consideration for an easement should be considered in these questions.

21. Scenic Values – is the property visible from a federal or state highway, major collector county road, minor collector county road, or private road? Please use the ‘Ravalli County Road and Bridge Department Functional Classification of County Roadways’ list.
22. Public Policy – is the property located in an area where the preservation of open space, agricultural or rural character is encouraged by an adopted land use plan or regulation, and is the property management consistent with the intent, goals and policies such as the Ravalli County Growth Policy, zoning regulations, or other planning documents?

Leverage

The Ravalli County Open Lands Bond Program seeks to maximize the use of its limited funds by leveraging other financial resources or additional protected property for each project.

23. Landowner Contribution– how much of the value of the conservation easement will be contributed by the landowner?
24. Proposal Partners – what proportion of the total price of the conservation easement will be contributed by a combination of partners including local government (not including the Open Lands Bond Program), state and federal governments, charitable foundations and non-profit land conservation organizations?
25. Percent of Project Cost Matched with Donation of a New Conservation Easement- what percent of the project cost will be matched with the donation of a new conservation easement?

Special Attributes

Below are examples of special attributes which may apply to a project. Others will be considered, but should be framed using the items below as examples. Applicants should work with Board members and their supporting land trust to identify special attributes which may exist on the property. Only the portion of the property under consideration for an easement should be considered when answering these questions.

26. National Prime Farmland Soils- what percentage of prime farmland soils are within the project area?
27. Natural Heritage Rank (Habitat and/or Species) - are there sensitive species on the property? The Montana National Heritage Program ranking system considers risks to

habitat or species. Please see <http://nhp.nris.state.mt.us/Community/ranks.asp> to help determine the ranking, if applicable, for the subject property.

28. TMDL Streams - do Montana DEQ designated TMDL impaired streams run through or adjacent to the property? Streams in the Bitterroot Headwaters are currently designated, and streams along the Bitterroot River are currently in the designation process. Please see <http://www.deq.state.mt.us/wqinfo/TMDL/FAQ.asp> for more information about TMDL waterways.
29. Public Access - does the property provide an important public trail linkage, fishing access, access to public lands or hunting access?